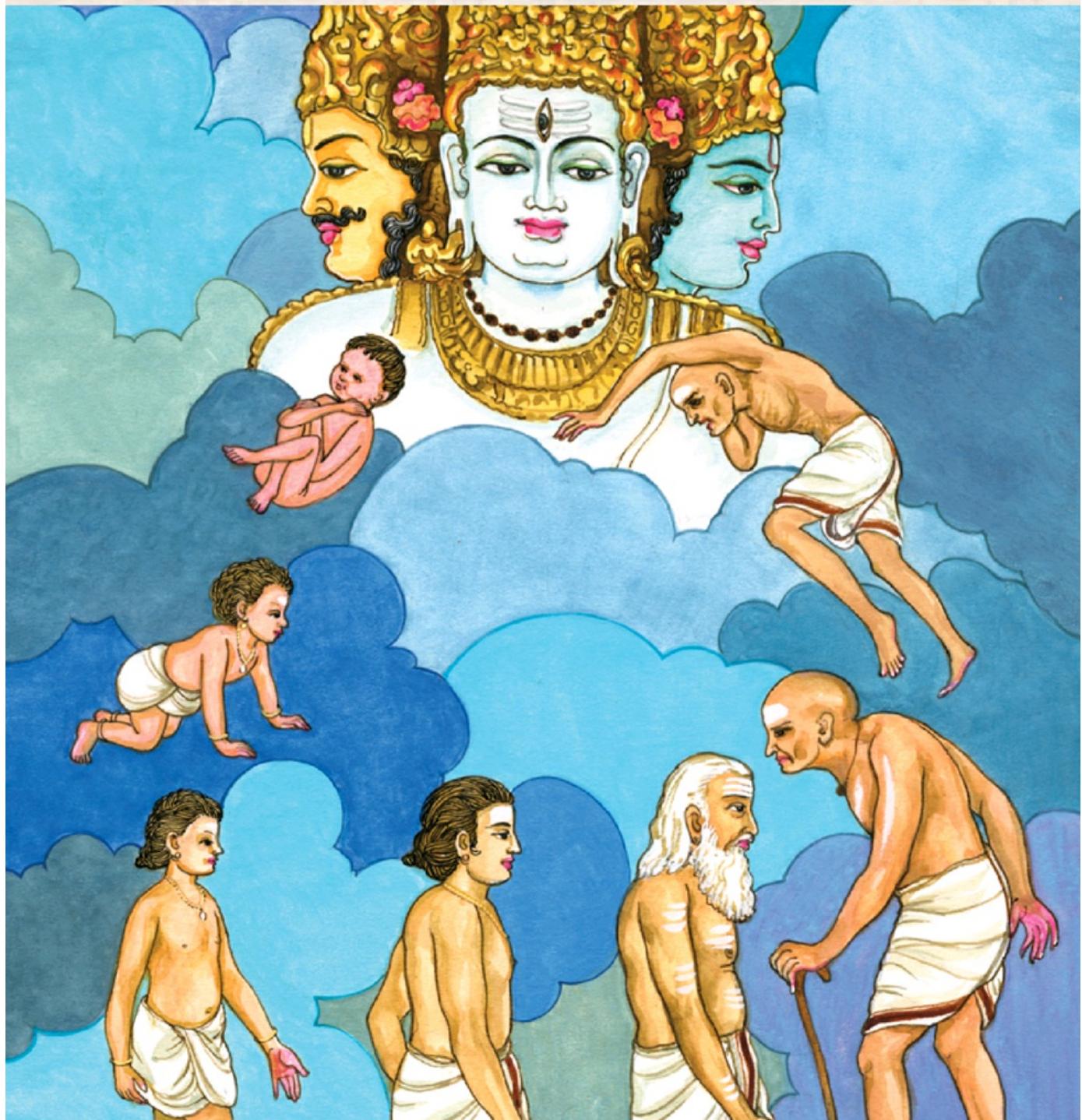


Karma and Reincarnation

AN INSPIRED TALK
BY SATGURU SIVAYA SUBRAMUNIYASWAMI



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The twin beliefs of karma and reincarnation are among Hinduism's many jewels of knowledge. Others include dharma or our pattern of religious conduct, worshipful communion with God and Gods, the necessary guidance of the Sat Guru, and finally enlightenment through personal realization of our identity in and with God. So the strong-shouldered and keen-minded rishis knew and stated in the Vedas.

And these are not mere assumptions of probing, brilliant minds. They are laws of the cosmos. As God's force of gravity shapes cosmic order, karma shapes experiential order. Our long sequence of lives is a tapestry of creating and resolving karmas-positive, negative and an amalgam of the two. During the succession of a soul's lives-through the mysteries of our higher chakras and God's and Guru's Grace-no karmic situation will arise that exceeds an individual's ability to resolve it in love and understanding.

Many people are very curious about their past lives and expend great time, effort and money to explore them. Actually, this curious probing into past lives is unnecessary. Indeed it is a natural protection from reliving past trauma or becoming infatuated more with our past lives than our present life that the inner recesses of the muladhara memory chakra are not easily accessed. For, as we exist now is a sum total of all our past lives. In our present moment, our mind and body state is the cumulative result of the entire spectrum of our past lives. So, no matter how great the intellectual knowing of these two key principles, it is how we currently live that positively shapes karma and unfolds us spiritually. Knowing the laws, we are responsible to resolve blossoming karmas from past lives and create karma that, projected into the future, will advance, not hinder, us.

Karma literally means "deed or act," but more broadly describes the principle of cause and effect. Simply stated, karma is the law of action and reaction which governs consciousness. In physics-the study of energy and matter-Sir Isaac Newton postulated that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. Push against a wall. Its material is molecularly pushing back with a force exactly equal to yours. In metaphysics, karma is the law that states that every mental, emotional and physical act, no matter how insignificant, is projected out into the psychic mind substance and eventually returns to the individual with equal impact.

The akashic memory in our higher chakras faithfully records the soul's impressions during its series of earthly lives, and in the astral/mental worlds in-between earth existences. Ancient yogis, in psychically studying the time line of cause/effect, assigned three categories to karma. The first is sanchita, the sum total of past karma yet to be resolved. The second category is prarabdha, that portion of sanchita karma being experienced in the present life. Kriyamana, the third type, is karma you are presently creating. However,

it must be understood that your past negative karma can be altered into a smoother, easier state through the loving, heart-chakra nature, through dharma and sadhana. That is the key of karmic wisdom. Live religiously well and you will create positive karma for the future and soften negative karma of the past. **Truths and Myths About Karma**

Karma operates not only individually, but also in ever-enlarging circles of group karma where we participate in the sum karma of multiple souls. This includes family, community, nation, race and religion, even planetary group karma. So if we, individually or collectively, unconditionally love and give, we will be loved and given to. The individuals or groups who act soulfully or maliciously toward us are the vehicle of our own karmic creation. The people who manifest your karma are also living through past karma and simultaneously creating future karma. For example, if their karmic pattern did not include miserliness, they would not be involved in your karma of selfishness. Another person may express some generosity toward you, fulfilling the gifting karma of your past experience. Imagine how intricately interconnected all the cycles of karma are for our planet's life forms.

Many people believe in the principle of karma, but don't apply its laws to their daily life or even to life's peak experiences. There is a tendency to cry during times of personal crisis, "Why has God done this to me?" or "What did I do to deserve this?" While God is the creator and sustainer of the cosmic law of karma, He does not dispense individual karma. He does not produce cancer in one person's body and develop Olympic athletic prowess in another's. We create our own experiences. It is really an exercising of our soul's powers of creation. Karma, then, is our best spiritual teacher. We spiritually learn and grow as our actions return to us to be resolved and dissolved. In this highest sense, there is no good and bad karma; there is self-created experience that presents opportunities for spiritual advancement. If we can't draw lessons from the karma, then we resist and/or resent it, lashing out with mental, emotional or physical force. The original substance of that karmic event is spent and no longer exists, but the current reaction creates a new condition of harsh karma.

Responsibility resolving karma is among the most important reasons that a Sat Guru is necessary in a sincere seeker's life. The Guru helps the devotee to hold his mind in focus, to become pointedly conscious of thought, word and deed. Without the guidance and grace of the Guru, the devotee's mind will be splintered between instinctive and intellectual forces, making it very difficult to resolve karma. Only when karma is wisely harnessed can the mind become still enough to experience its own superconscious depths.

Karma is also misunderstood as fate, an unchangeable destiny decreed long ago by agencies or forces external to us such as the planet and stars, or Gods. Karma is neither fate nor predetermination. Each soul has absolute free will. Its only boundary is karma. God and Gods do not dictate the experiential events of our lives, nor do they test us. And there is no cosmic force that molds our life. Indeed, when beseeched through deep prayer

and worship, the Supreme Being and His great Gods may intercede within our karma, lightening its impact or shifting its location in time to a period when we are better prepared to resolve it. Hindu astrology, or Jyotisha, details a real relation between ourselves and the geography of the solar system and certain star clusters, but it is not a cause-effect relation. Planets and stars don't cause or dictate karma. Their orbital relationships establish proper conditions for karmas to activate and a particular type of personality nature to develop. Jyotisha describes a relation of revealment: it reveals prarabdha karmic patterns for a given birth and how we will generally react to them (kriyamana karma). This is like a pattern of different colored windows allowing sunlight in to reveal and color a house's arrangement of furniture. With astrological knowledge we are aware of our life's karmic pattern and can thereby anticipate it wisely. Reincarnation: A Soul's Path to Godness

The soul dwells as the inmost body of light and superconscious, universal mind of a series of nested bodies, each more refined than the next: physical, pranic, astral, mental. In our conscious mind we think and feel ourselves to be a physical body with some intangible spirit within it. Yet, right now our real identity is the soul that is sensing through its multiple bodies physical, emotional and mental experience. Recognizing this as reality, we powerfully know that life doesn't end with the death of the biological body. The soul continues to occupy the astral body, a subtle, luminous duplicate of the physical body. This subtle body is made of higher-energy astral matter and dwells in a dimension called the astral plane. If the soul body itself is highly evolved, it will occupy the astral/mental bodies on a very refined plane of the astral known as the Devaloka, "the world of light-shining beings." At death, the soul slowly becomes totally aware in its astral/mental bodies and it predominantly lives through those bodies in the astral dimension.

The soul functions with complete continuity in its astral/mental bodies. It is with these sensitive vehicles that we experience dream or "astral" worlds during sleep every night. The astral world is equally as solid and beautiful, as varied and comprehensive as the earth dimension-if not much more so. Spiritual growth, psychic development, guidance in matters of governance and commerce, artistic cultivation, inventions and discoveries of medicine, science and technology all continue by astral people who are "in-between" earthly lives. Many of the Veda hymns entreat the assistance of devas: advanced astral or mental people. Yet, also in the grey, lower regions of this vast, invisible dimension exist astral people whose present pursuits are base, selfish, even sadistic. Where the person goes in the astral plane at sleep or death is dependent upon his earthly pursuits and the quality of his mind.

Because certain seed karmas can only be resolved in earth consciousness and because the soul's initial realizations of Absolute Reality are only achieved in a physical body, our soul joyously enters another biological body. At the right time, it is reborn into a flesh body that will best fulfill its karmic pattern. In this process, the current astral body-which is a duplicate of the last physical form-is sluffed off as a lifeless shell that in due course disintegrates, and a new astral body develops as the new physical body grows. This

entering into another body is called reincarnation: "re-occupying the flesh."

During our thousands of earth lives, a remarkable variety of life patterns are experienced. We exist as male and female, often switching back and forth from life to life as the nature becomes more harmonized into a person exhibiting both feminine nurturing and masculine intrepidity. We come to earth as princesses and presidents, as paupers and pirates, as tribals and scientists, as murderers and healers, as atheists and, ultimately, God-Realized sages. We take bodies of every race and live the many religions, faiths and philosophies as the soul gains more knowledge and evolutionary experience.

Therefore, the Hindu knows that the belief in a single life on earth, followed by eternal joy or pain is utterly wrong and causes great anxiety, confusion and fear. Hindus know that all souls reincarnate, take one body and then another, evolving through experience over long periods of time. Like the caterpillar's metamorphosis into the butterfly, death doesn't end our existence but frees us to pursue an even greater development.

Understanding the laws of the death process, the Hindu is vigilant of his thoughts and mental loyalties. He knows that the contents of his mind at the point of death in large part dictate where he will function in the astral plane and the quality of his next birth. Secret questionings and doubt of Hindu belief, and associations with other belief systems will automatically place him among like-minded people whose beliefs are alien to Hinduism. A nominal Hindu on earth could be a selfish materialist in the astral world. The Hindu also knows that death must come naturally, in its own course, and that suicide only accelerates the intensity of one's karma, bringing a series of immediate lesser births and requiring several lives for the soul to return to the exact evolutionary point that existed at the moment of suicide, at which time the still-existing karmic entanglements must again be faced and resolved.

Two other karmically sensitive processes are: 1) artificially sustaining life in a wholly incapacitated physical body through mechanical devices, drugs or intravenous feeding; and 2) euthanasia, "mercy killing." There is a critical timing in the death transition. The dying process can involve long suffering or be peaceful or painfully sudden: all dependent on the karma involved. To keep a person on life support with the sole intent of continuing the body's biological functions nullifies the natural timing of death. It also keeps the person's astral body earthbound, tethered to a lower astral region rather than being released into higher astral levels.

An important lesson to learn here is that karma is conditioned by intent. When the medical staff receives a dangerously ill or injured person and they place him on life support as part of an immediate life-saving procedure, their intent is pure healing. If their attempts are unsuccessful, then the life-support devices are turned off, the person dies naturally and there is no karma involved and it does not constitute euthanasia. However, if the doctors, family or patient decide to continue life support indefinitely to prolong biological processes, (usually motivated by a Western belief of a single life) then the

intent carries full karmic consequences. When a person is put on long-term life support, he must be left on it until some natural biological or environmental event brings death. If he is killed through euthanasia, this again further disturbs the timing of the death. As a result, the timing of future births would be drastically altered.

Euthanasia, the willful destruction of a physical body, is a very serious karma. This applies to all cases including someone experiencing long-term, intolerable pain. Even such difficult life experiences must be allowed to resolve themselves naturally. Dying may be painful, but death itself is not. All those involved (directly or indirectly) in euthanasia will proportionately take on the remaining prarabdha karma of the dying person. And the euthanasia participants will, to the degree contributed, face a similar karmic situation in this or a future life.

Finally, there is exercising wisdom-which is knowing and using divine law-in the overall context of any situation For example, a vegetative person in a coma is on long-term life support in a hospital when a patient is brought in for emergency treatment requiring that same life support equipment. Weighing the two karmas, a doctor could dharmically unplug the comatose patient in order to save the other's life. *Moksha: Freedom From Rebirth*

Life's real attainment is not money, not material luxury, not sexual or eating pleasure, not intellectual, business or political power, or any other of the instinctive or intellectual needs. These are natural pursuits, to be sure, but our divine purpose on this earth is to personally realize our identity in and with God. This is now called by many names: enlightenment, Self-Realization, God-Realization and Nirvikalpa Samadhi. After many lifetimes of wisely controlling the creation of karma and resolving past karmas when they return, the soul is fully matured in the knowledge of these divine laws and the highest use of them. Through the practice of yoga, the Hindu bursts into God's superconscious Mind, the experience of bliss, all-knowingness, perfect silence. His intellect is transmuted, and he soars into the Absolute Reality of God. He is a jnani, a knower of the Known. When the jnani is stable in repeating his realization of the Absolute, there is no longer a need for physical birth, for all lessons have been learned, all karmas fulfilled and Godness is his natural mind state. That individual soul is then naturally liberated, freed from the cycle of birth, death & rebirth on this planet. After Moksha, our soul continues its evolution in the inner worlds, eventually to merge back into its origin: God, the Primal Soul.

Every Hindu expects to seek for and attain moksha. But he or she does not expect that it will necessarily come in this present life. Hindus know this and do not delude themselves that this life is the last. Seeking and attaining profound spiritual realizations, they nevertheless know that there is much to be accomplished on earth and that only mature, God-Realized souls attain Moksha.

God may seem distant and remote as the experience of our self-created karmas cloud our

mind. Yet, in reality, the Supreme Being is always closer to you than the beat of your heart. His Mind pervades the totality of your karmic experience and lifetimes. As karma is God's cosmic law of cause and effect, dharma is God's law of Being, including the pattern of Hindu religiousness. Through following dharma and controlling thought, word and deed, karma is harnessed and wisely created. You become the master, the knowing creator, not a helpless victim. Through being consistent in our religiousness, following the yamas and niyamas (Hindu restraints and observances), performing the pancha nitya karmas (five constant duties), seeing God everywhere and in everyone, our past karma will soften. We may experience the karma indirectly through seeing someone else going through a situation that we intuitively know was a karma we also were to face. But because of devout religiousness, we may experience it vicariously or in lesser intensity. For example, a physical karma may manifest as a mental experience or a realistic dream; an emotional karmic storm may just barely touch our mind before dying out.

The belief in karma and reincarnation brings to each Hindu inner peace and self-assurance. The Hindu knows that the maturing of the soul takes many lives, and that if the soul is immature in the present birth, then there is hope, for there will be many opportunities for learning and growing in future lives. Yes, these beliefs and the attitudes they produce eliminate anxiety, giving the serene perception that everything is all right as it is. And, there is also a keen insight into the human condition and appreciation for people in all stages of spiritual unfoldment.